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SUBJECT: SPLM DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OPENS DARFUR OFFICES

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: SPLM Deputy Secretary General Yassir Arman announced the establishment of a SPLM political office for North Darfur on April 12. Local government leaders, including the Wali of North Darfur, opposition parties' representatives, NCP members, and rebel groups such as JEM/Peace Wing and SLA/Minni Minawi were present. Yassir touted the SPLM's "New Sudan" vision and promised the SPLM would bring economic development to Darfur. He carried out similar outreach in West Darfur. END SUMMARY.

SPLM OFFERS DARFURIANS A NEW SUDAN

¶12. (U) During a well-received 45-minute address in El Fasher, Yassir commented on both regional and local issues. He emphasized that the Chad-Sudan conflict must be permanently solved to ensure stability in Darfur. Yassir also announced the SPLM's plans for a national convention in May and invited all Darfurians to attend the conference and present their views.

¶13. (U) Championing SPLM's vision of a "New Sudan", Yassir explained that the SPLM proposes to use oil revenues to develop pastoral and agricultural sectors of Darfur's economy and fund protection of IDPs. On the health front, he said that the SPLM will work with local organizations to eradicate HIV/AIDS through seminars, workshops and awareness campaigns. He stated that the SPLM is committed to the CPA and will work to build upon it as part of the New Sudan. He emphasized that both the NCP and the SPLM have a responsibility to work together on developing solutions to the Darfur conflict and have developed a joint NCP-SPLM working group on the issue.

¶14. (U) Noting that Darfur has suffered cultural, economic and political marginalization, Yassir charged that the NCP should respect past agreements and consider re-establishing Darfur as one region. He criticized the NCP for not being realistic about IDP voluntary returns, noting that "this cannot take place without security and stability in the area."

SPLM ON THE CENSUS IN DARFUR AND OTHER PLANS

¶15. (SBU) In response to poloff's question whether he would attempt to convince Darfurians to support the upcoming census, Yassir blamed the NCP for lying about the census, which he claimed has led many IDPs to reject it. Asked whether the SPLM would directly appeal to Darfurians to participate in the census, Yassir said that a direct statement of support will do little good, as it will take time for the SPLM to undo the lies that the NCP has spread about the census. (NOTE: At the time of this dedication, the SPLM had not yet announced its suspension of the census in the South. The SPLM and the NCP have worked out their differences over the census and both parties will move forward with the census on 22 April. END NOTE.)

¶ 16. (SBU) Yassir told poloff that while in Darfur he would press both signatory and non-signatory groups to advance the Darfur peace process and make preparations for a Juba II meeting. He pointed to the attendance of JEM/Peace Wing and SLM/Minni Minawi at the ceremony as evidence of rebel support for the SPLM's effort to promote peace in Darfur.

¶ 17. (SBU) Arman told CDA Fernandez in Khartoum on April 15 that he had also visited the West Darfur capital of El-Geneina. He had found a very receptive audience (including the local Fur Governor, who heads an SLM former rebel splinter group), had held a mass rally, and had sworn in new local leaders. Yassir said that even pro-NCP figures are chafing at the lack of security, the rumors of Arab refugees from Chad and Niger being resettled in the state (which he believes may be overstated), and just the general difficulty of life in West Darfur. He described one pro-NCP tribal leader who quoted the Arab proverb "the husband of my mother is my father" to show that most leaders in the area are not enamored of the regime but feel they have to go along with it in order to survive.

¶ 18. (SBU) COMMENT: It is a positive development that the SPLM is beginning to regularly send someone of Yassir's stature in the SPLM to Darfur and these visits should occur more frequently (his last trip there was over a year ago). The SPLM needs to include Darfur in its pro-active strategy to pressure the Khartoum regime, and build wider coalitions, and should reach out more regularly to the movements and the people in Darfur. A Jaalayn from River Nile State and former Communist in his youth (he also hails from the same tribe as President Bashir, with whom Yassir has a distant family connection) Yassir represents an alternative viewpoint of opposition within the North, which appeals to Darfurians and which the SPLM should take advantage of more regularly.

¶ 19. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

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FERNANDEZ